



**Congressman Donald M. Payne, Jr.**  
*Representing New Jersey's 10th District*



Juan Lopez, a seventeen-year-old Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipient, will be Rep. Donald M. Payne, Jr.'s guest at the 2018 State of the Union. Lopez immigrated to the United States from Uruguay at age two and was raised in Newark, New Jersey. He was selected for the Rutgers Future Scholars Program, which is a college preparatory mentoring program for select first-generation, low-income, academically promising students from local schools. Lopez is a senior at Newark's Science Park High School and plans to attend Rutgers—Newark on a scholarship to study pre-engineering. In anticipation of the State of the Union address, Lopez issued the following message.

**A Message from Juan Lopez**



My name is Juan Lopez and I arrived to the United States of America at the young age of two years old. I have been living in the United States for over fifteen years now. I remember the first time I heard my legal status referred to as “illegal alien.” I immediately felt as though the term did not fit. “Alien” means outsider, and I have never felt like one. I have lived the entirety of my life in the same place, but I am not ashamed of where I was from. I embraced the term “undocumented” and have used it as a propelling force in my own pursuit of greatness.

My family emigrated from a third-world country for the sake of my sister and me. Every day I benefit from that decision, and I feel as though it was the right one. I am a recipient of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, otherwise known as DACA, and it is something I am very proud of. I am a DREAMer, and I will continue to dream

whether it is here, or wherever the government sends me. My drive will never change, regardless of the boundaries that are placed on me.

DACA has given me the opportunity to succeed within a country that is systematically designed to make people like me fail. DACA has allowed me to work, attend a four-year university—something that I plan to do—as well as be a prevalent face of change. I have watched my parents struggle for years, and every label placed on families like my own will only continue to make us stronger. We will no longer be called “aliens”—we are DREAMers, those who still hold

on to this American Dream very tightly, hoping to never have to wake up. I am in touch with the community affected by this policy within my own hometown of Newark, New Jersey, and know all too well the feeling of disappointment when having to apply as an international student within a country you have lived in your whole life. It honestly feels like a slap in the face.

Imagine for a moment training your whole life for a single race, just one race that decides whether or not you make it. When you get to the start, you realize that most people are starting hundreds of meters in front of you. You also realize that they all have sponsors for the race. Those sponsors provided them money to get coaches and the proper stepping stones for success—something that you had to do for yourself. The race starts and ends faster than you think, but when you get to the finish line, you realize that you have trained extremely hard and finished top three, but since you were not sponsored, you did not make it.

Now imagine being an undocumented student, one who has worked countless nights on school work—many of those with only a few hours of sleep—and pulled better grades than native English speakers. Now, you are applying to college, showing transcripts of great grades, high SAT scores, and amazing recommendation; but because you are applying as an international student, you are not competing with those you grew up with. Rather, you are competing with the rest of the world. The costs of college become overwhelming and you cannot file with FAFSA for any money from the federal government, or even take out loans that could later be paid off. So you have two options—community college or finding a full time job. If you feel overwhelmed or scared, then you are feeling the true concerns of many undocumented students—those who do not have a voice to speak up against injustice, those who are told to “go back to their home countries” when this is the only one they know. I notice this, being that I, too, am an undocumented student. I live this, so as way to combat the system, I personally run a small email chain among peers and even adults, who seek information on the process of applying to college when they, or someone they may happen to know, are undocumented. No child my age, or even younger, wants to throw away the opportunities their parents have given them through countless sacrifice—opportunities that could not be paid by any sum of money or guarantees.

If I am able to touch a single life by emailing my peers scholarship opportunities made specifically for their situations, I will. I know how to speak, read, and write Spanish fluently. Because of that, I am able to communicate with people from all walks of life, regardless of their cultural background or environment. Living in Newark, I have met people from many different countries and have been emerged entirely into a world of varying demographics—a world to which I have been able to adapt.

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